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instead of thumbing through the old Yellow Pages have had to suffer indignities for years. First there were those annoying tape-recorded lectures ("You really *can* help keep your phone costs down . . ."). Then they started charging for the calls. Finally, there was the phone strike.

But brothers Dave and Bill Lappen have a solution for 411 fanatics—as long as they own a computer. It's called **Buy-Phone**—and it's a cross-referenced listing of 10,000 merchants and service people in the area bounded by Western Avenue, Mulholland Drive, the Pacific and LAX.

For instance, suppose you wanted Chinese food but couldn't come up with a nearby restaurant. You'd activate Buy-Phone, indicate your location and ask for "restaurant." In seconds, the computer would display several choices: BANQUET, ENTERTAINMENT, FOOD-TO-GO or NATIONALITY." You'd pick NATIONALITY, and then under that category, pick CHINESE. Narrow that down to HUNAN, say, and Buy-Phone shows you the nearest restaurant of your choice in the neighborhood.

The service is free to consumers but costs merchants and businesses \$150 a year. The Lappens hope to expand Buy-Phone to 50,000 entries over a broader area soon.

The best thing about Buy-Phone (aside from eliminating a foot-high stack of phone directories) is that even people who can't spell can use it. If your entry does not compute, the machine will display a list of similar words, properly spelled, and you can try again.

Information operators never did that, but then, they didn't have to. They're the phone company.

—Lisa La Valle

LET YOUR COMPUTER DO THE WALKING

People who are addicted to
dialing directory assistance

PAUL ROGERS

